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NATO Enlargement:

Sailing between Scylla and Charybdis

by Hans Binnendijk

Conclusions

The NATO enlargement process faces two dangers. The first is that enlargement will proceed too fast. If we move too fast, enlargement could upset a very delicate political process underway in Russia. This has been Europe's concern this year.

The other danger is that if we slow the process too much, we will lose momentum and the process will stall. This may be Europe's concern next year.

NATO needs an enlargement plan that sails deftly between this Scylla and Charybdis.

What Can We Learn from History?

History teaches us the importance of Central and Eastern Europe to world peace. Two World Wars and the Cold War were fought this century primarily over the territory between Germany and Russia.

There have been four previous enlargements of NATO. The lesson is that previously countries either have joined in steps or with conditions.

- Greece and Turkey joined in 1952, but they became associate members before becoming full members.
- West Germany joined in 1955, but at first it joined indirectly via the Western Union.
- Spain joined in 1982 but it has not yet joined the integrated military command.
- East Germany joined in 1990 when it united with West Germany, but NATO deployments in the former East Germany are initially limited.

Recent history tells us that the U.S./NATO decision to enlarge was made in phases and without a clear consensus:

- 1993 was a year of deliberation in the U.S. Government, mostly in the State Department. Both State and the National Security Council were split internally on the issue. Momentum for enlargement was reversed temporarily by Russian events of October 1993. This cleared the way for

Partnership for Peace (PFP) to become the centerpiece for the January 1994 summit.

- 1994 was a year of decision. The January NATO summit in Brussels created the PFP and it opened the door for enlargement. Richard Holbrooke became Assistant Secretary of State and championed enlargement. President Clinton travelled to Warsaw that July and declared in a speech that enlargement was not a matter of whether, but when. The December 1994 Ministerial commissioned a NATO study on the "why and how" of enlargement, and a sense of momentum was created.
- 1995 is the year of the Russian reaction. It actually started in November 1994 with President Boris Yeltsin's "Cold Peace" speech in Budapest which was followed by Russia's unwillingness to sign its Individual Partnership Program (IPP) and to implement its cooperation plans with NATO. While the Russian reaction was modified at the May 1995 Moscow summit and Noordwijk meeting, their opposition continues.

Partnership for Peace a Success

In less than two years, PFP has become a true success. It is no longer seen by most partners as a second best alternative to NATO membership, but as a practical way to modernize their armed forces and to become more interoperable with NATO forces.

Twenty-six new partner countries have joined PFP and they are beginning the process of self-differentiation. Sixteen have liaison officers at SHAPE's Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC); and the PCC together with Russian liaison officers participated in planning for the Bosnia IFOR deployment. Fourteen countries are participating in the PFP Planning and Review Process which provides a high degree of military transparency.

The United States has committed \$100 million to support PFP activities. Militarily, PFP countries have participated in numerous exercises and significant military events. But PFP is still somewhat schizophrenic. Some see it as a prep school for NATO--others see it as a lasting institution which will perform peacekeeping, humanitarian, and search and rescue functions.

So Why Enlarge?

There are at least four reasons why NATO enlargement has emerged as U.S. policy. The reasons can be personified in four individuals.

- Vladimir Zhirinovsky represents the fear of a reversal in Russia.
- Vaclav Havel personifies the heroes of the revolutions of 1989-90. They want NATO insurance and believe enlargement will secure their reforms.
- Volker Ruehe, the German Minister of Defense, has made it clear that a stable Central Europe is vital to German interests.
- Senator Richard Lugar, who coined the phrase "out of area or out of business", represents the views of many pro-NATO conservatives who are prepared to make enlargement a 1996 campaign issue.

And now that enlargement has been promised, a reversal would undermine NATO's credibility in Central Europe.

Impact of Enlargement on Russia

There is not much consensus in Russia today on anything, but there is a consensus among the national security elite against enlargement. There were some mixed diplomatic signals early on which complicated the U.S. assessment. In the fall of 1993, for example, Yeltsin at first appeared to accept enlargement and then sent a letter to Western leaders strongly opposing it. Subsequently, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Mamedov was sent to negotiate conditions for enlargement, only to have his actions denounced by Yeltsin three months later.

Russian analysts combine enlargement, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), and decision-making for Bosnia and see the mix as the beginning of a new world system which excludes or limits them. As a result, there is a new "Versailles syndrome" in Russia which stresses that Russia did not lose the Cold War but now it is being humiliated like a vanquished power.

Western analysts believe that the Visegrad states joining NATO should not constitute a military threat to Russia. But if the Baltic states or Ukraine would join, most Russian analysts would see Russia's vital interests threatened. Some Russian analysts are also worried about the further isolation of Kaliningrad and about the loss of arms sales to the Visegrad states.

Perhaps most important in the long run, many Russians believe that NATO enlargement would draw a new line in Europe which would create cultural and economic barriers that would be impossible to overcome.

Public opinion in Russia is vague about enlargement. Polls show 49% seek a special relationship with NATO while 31% oppose the Visegrad states entering into NATO. The majority doesn't know. But in the current election climate, no political leader can support enlargement without being attacked by nationalists. So all politicians must oppose enlargement for now.

It is no secret that there is a move to oust Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. The enlargement issue is one of several being used by the national security elite to oust him because of the mixed signals his ministry sent.

Russian planners think they can reverse enlargement by concentrating their arguments on Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and the U.S. Congress. Their approach is "more in sorrow than in anger"; their first effort is to postpone the decision and they have had some success.

Russian observers say that if NATO enlarges, Russia may abandon START II, the CFE Treaty, and even the INF Treaty. They will further strengthen ties among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and they may even develop closer relations with rogue states like Iran and Libya.

The political framework for enhanced NATO-Russian relations thus far is a bare-bones effort to institutionalize security cooperation and establish better mutual political consultations. More progress needs to be made in this important effort. The progress made in negotiating the Bosnia peace agreement and in integrating Russian troops into the IFOR, however, should lead to closer NATO-Russian relations.

To avoid a major break with Russia, NATO must take Russia's vital interests into account without giving them a veto over NATO enlargement. This means institutionalizing the "no surprises" pledge and not extending early membership to the Baltic States or Ukraine. Even the candidate states agree that the decision on "who and when" should not be made before next summer. With a delay and development of stronger NATO-Russian relations, NATO hopes it can manage a modest enlargement by 2000.

Impact on Eastern Europe

There is an arc of countries from Tallinn to Tirana that will not be NATO members for the foreseeable future.

- Extending a true Article 5 commitment to the Baltic states or Ukraine now would present a provocation to Russia and would be a NATO defense planner's nightmare. Excluding them from enlargement will complicate their security problems.
- Romania remains a potential candidate, but its pace of reform and residual ethnic problems probably means they will not join in the next few years.
- Bulgaria since the 1994 elections seems to have reduced its interest in NATO candidacy.
- Albania and Macedonia have major ethnic and border problems and need to make significant reforms.

However, as NATO proceeds, it risks separating Central Europe from Eastern Europe and creating a strategic vacuum in the East. States in this region are concerned because they will have no firm security framework, and they may have to deal with a Russia which is more aggressive in response to enlargement.

The West must design a better security framework for Eastern Europe before NATO enlarges. This could be a combination of regional security arrangements, a stronger PFP with a significant political component, and bilateral efforts with countries like Ukraine.

Impact on Central Europe

Not all of the Visegrad states may be ready to join NATO at the same time. The 1995 NATO study on enlargement concluded that decisions should be on a case by case basis. While the NATO study makes clear that there are no fixed criteria, it does provide some guidelines, including that ethnic and border disputes need to be settled. Progress on democratic reform and civil-military relation will also be an important factor.

The Czech Republic is the most eligible candidate of the former Warsaw Pact countries. It has made constant progress on political and economic reforms, and it has considerable economic resources. It has made progress in developing effective civilian control over the military. It has downsized its armed forces to 65,000 and restructured them to accommodate NATO integration. While its armed forces still have severe problems with readiness standards, they are doing better than the other Visegrad states. The Czech Republic has no serious problems with ethnic minorities nor is it threatened militarily by anyone.

Despite the victory of post-Communist candidates in September 1993 and November 1995, Poland still has the greatest political support in the United States for NATO entry. There has been confusion over whether the president or prime minister has authority over the military, which has contributed to significant civil-military problems. Those problems may be ameliorated by the results of the recent presidential elections. Poland is also a likely candidate for early NATO membership because of its location, its support in the United States and its considerable military capability.

Hungary is also a good candidate for NATO membership but its candidacy still faces three sets of problems. First, unlike Poland and the Czech Republic, Hungary still has unsettled ethnic problems with its neighbors. Second, though it has made progress, it still has much to do to achieve adequate civilian

control over its military. And third, if Austria does not join, Hungary would not be contiguous with the rest of NATO. If the first two can be settled, the third can be overcome.

Slovakia has perhaps the furthest to go of the four Visegrad states. It has suffered from political instability since its independence in January 1993, and currently Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar and President Michal Kovac are in a power struggle. Slovakia is building many of its military institutions from scratch, and civil-military relations require considerable improvement. Slovakia's hesitation in ratifying its bilateral agreement with Hungary and its latest language laws do not bode well for Slovakia's candidacy.

Impact on Western Europe

Western Europe is somewhat divided on the enlargement issue, with Northern Europe generally more interested than Southern Europe. A West European consensus could form around the proposition that NATO enlargement should be tied to EU enlargement. But that may take too long for some in the United States and Germany.

The three new EU member states would all have a credible claim to NATO membership. But for now, Sweden and Finland have opted for PFP membership only. Austria also favors a similar arrangement, but efforts may be made to convince them to join in order to bring in Hungary.

Impact on NATO

The just completed NATO study focuses on enlarging in a way that strengthens rather than weakens NATO. New countries will join with the full rights and obligations of other NATO members. A major element in choosing new candidates will be maintaining the viability of the current consensus decision-making process.

The study stresses that NATO does not want to import conflict by accepting members that have not settled ethnic or border disputes.

A minimum degree of military interoperability will be needed on the part of candidate countries so that NATO can operate smoothly. The extent of the modernization required has already generated a debate about the danger of extending "hollow commitments" which could cost NATO tens of billions of dollars to fix.

The study also concludes that NATO has no a priori need for the forward deployment of either troops or nuclear weapons into any candidate country, but it reserves the right to do so.

Finally, in a compromise with the French, the study states that there is a "probability" that new members will join the integrated command.

Impact in the United States

The enlargement issue has been debated in U.S. academic circles, with many specialists taking very cautious positions on enlargement. But the issue has not been debated adequately in the U.S. Senate.

There is bipartisan support for enlargement in the Senate--where 67 Senators must support it--but it is shallow. Senator Lugar has been the strongest advocate of enlargement. Senators Brown, Roth, Simon,

and Murkowski have introduced an amendment to the FY96 foreign aid appropriations bill intended to strengthen the NATO participation provisions of existing law. Those provisions, passed last year, encouraged programs which would facilitate the transition to NATO membership for the four Visegrad states. But the FY96 amendment was significantly weakened in conference with the House, demonstrating the lack of Congressional consensus on the issue.

Others are very skeptical. Senator Sam Nunn, for example, has raised concerns about its impact on Russia and has argued that we would have time to reconstitute our capability and expand NATO should Russian reform collapse. He suggests linking NATO enlargement to EU enlargement unless a shift in Russian behavior requires an accelerated pace.

Recommendations

- NATO needs to sail carefully between Scylla and Charybdis to avoid moving too fast or stalling.
- A decision on who should join should be delayed until after the Russian presidential election, and probably until after the U.S. presidential election.
- The December 1995 Ministerial needs to demonstrate progress. Perhaps a special high-level group should be established to recommend the "who and when" of enlargement.
- The Senate should debate the issue fully early in 1997 before a final NATO decision is made.
- The leading candidates are the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. The most acceptable decision might be to take two candidates by the year 2000, probably the Czech Republic and Poland.
- NATO should not expand to include the Baltic states or Ukraine anytime soon. Romania and Bulgaria will probably have to wait.
- A more comprehensive set of security measures should be put into place for Eastern European states before enlargement. This might include merging the NACC and the PFP, or using other means to strengthen the political role of PFP. Partners should meet regularly with the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The Western European Union could further strengthen the role of the WEU associate partners.
- A stronger NATO-Russian relationship must be built without giving Russia a veto over NATO affairs. For example, a permanent NATO liaison office that reports directly to the Secretary General might be established in Moscow. These steps need to be put into place before new NATO members are announced.

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